

Communist University

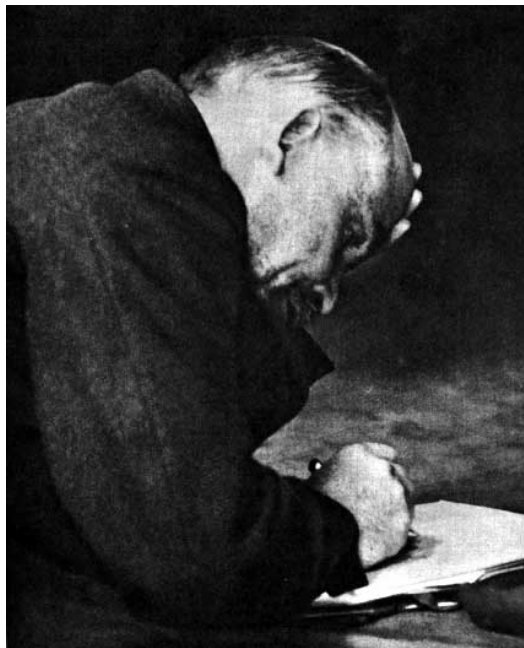


2013

Agitprop

Part 1

Writing, Editing and Press Releases



Lenin, Writing

Writing

Writing comes first because it is the ordering art of so many other arts.

In politics, writing is indispensable. Most of our cadres need to be able to write. By being able to write is meant more than to be literate, just as being literate means more than to be able to read.

The question of language will mainly be left to the final CU course, which will just be on Languages. Suffice it to say that we need writers in all languages used in South Africa, and not just in the 11 official ones. We need people who can at least handle text in French, Portuguese, Swahili, and Arabic, too.

But in this item, we are talking about writing in general. What advice can we give?

The purpose of writing is to be understood. Political writing is better when it is shorter. To compose your thoughts, use “Mind Maps”, as described in the attached text. To organise your research, follow the “Organic Study Guide” contained in the document, and similar advice.

Write in Prose. Prose is in paragraphs, and it has a beginning, middle and end. Prose does not rely on bullets, numbers, letters or other listing mechanisms.

A good way to start writing is to write in a way that is adapted from the way you speak. If you can make yourself understood in speech, then you should be able to make yourself as well understood with the same words on paper. Then you can improve. There is no requirement for you to be pompous. Simplicity is best.

Political writing is better when shorter. Nearly all kinds of writing are limited as to length. Therefore make a habit of watching the number of words in any piece of writing (your own, and whenever possible, other people's).

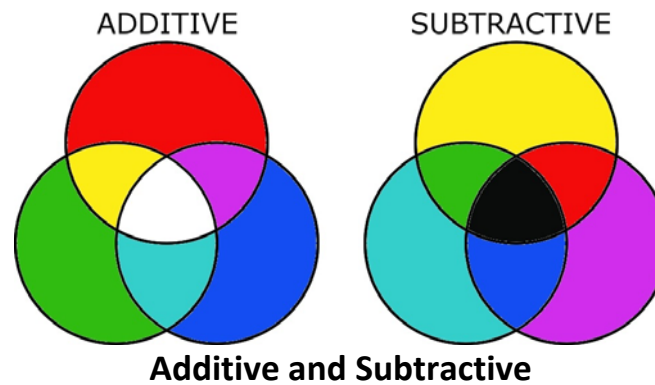
On the next page is a rough indication of the kinds of length required for different kinds of writing. From this chart it can be seen that each succeeding kind of project can be built up by repeating elements like the preceding, smaller ones. Writing is modular, like bricklaying. The modules are small. Short sentences and short paragraphs are best in political writing, and in journalism. If you can write a sentence, then you can write a book.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Length (+/-)</u>
Sentence	10 words
Paragraph	50 words
Letter to the Editor	300 words
Press Release/Newspaper Report	300 words
Article (“op ed” or “feature”)	750 words
Speech (100 words per minute)	1 500 words
Essay	2 500 words
Chapter of a book	5 000 words
Book of ten chapters	50 000 words

Reading goes with writing. Both are habits. Keep reading, and keep writing, like breathing in and breathing out. Try to write for people. Any readers are good readers. Even a small amount of feedback is extremely instructive.

Lenin described himself as a writer. Lenin’s style became clearer and clearer and he became more experienced. Lenin’s style is a good model of shortness combined with clarity.

Writing is a pleasure. The Chilean communist writer Volodia Teitelboim used to say that writing was the easiest way he knew of being happy.



Editing

All writing is edited. If it was not, it could not be constrained to fit the space available, which is always limited. The time that readers have for reading, is also limited.

Editing is done in all sorts of ways.

Usually it means, in the first place, selection. Editors pick, from a very wide field, a much smaller, limited amount of material. The criteria for selection may be political, or some other quality, like a special interest of a group of readers, or a sectional appeal such as to women, youth, educators.

Editing can also mean removal of excess and repetition from a text. This is often referred to a “redaction”, from the French word for “editor”, which is “*redacteur*”. Redaction that takes out whole passages, paragraphs and sentences is a quick way to reduce length

The Communist University is a product of editing. It has been constructed by a combined process of selection and redaction; while the openings to discussion of the short texts, are equivalent to the “Editorials” in a newspaper, which are the editor’s own voice.

Sub-editing

Sub-editing is also called (in USA English) copy-editing. Sub-editing is the writing of articles as they are going to be printed, as opposed to reporting, which is the gathering of stories. Reporters may sub-edit their own material to an extent, but the sub-editor is the one who must adjust the material to fit the space available. Sub-editors are the real writers of newspapers. Their techniques are the best.

Length per Page

This varies widely and is affected by all other variables. In a broadsheet newspaper page there can be thousands of words on one page. On a booklet page there might be 300 words. On an A4 page there may be as many as 500, or in a print-magazine page with graphics and in columns, more than 600 words.

Headlines

Headlines in newspapers and magazines are added by sub-editors, and not by the writers of articles. Headlines need to be short, so that they can be fat. Sub-headings, like the ones used on this page, help to break up slabs of text and make it easier to read.

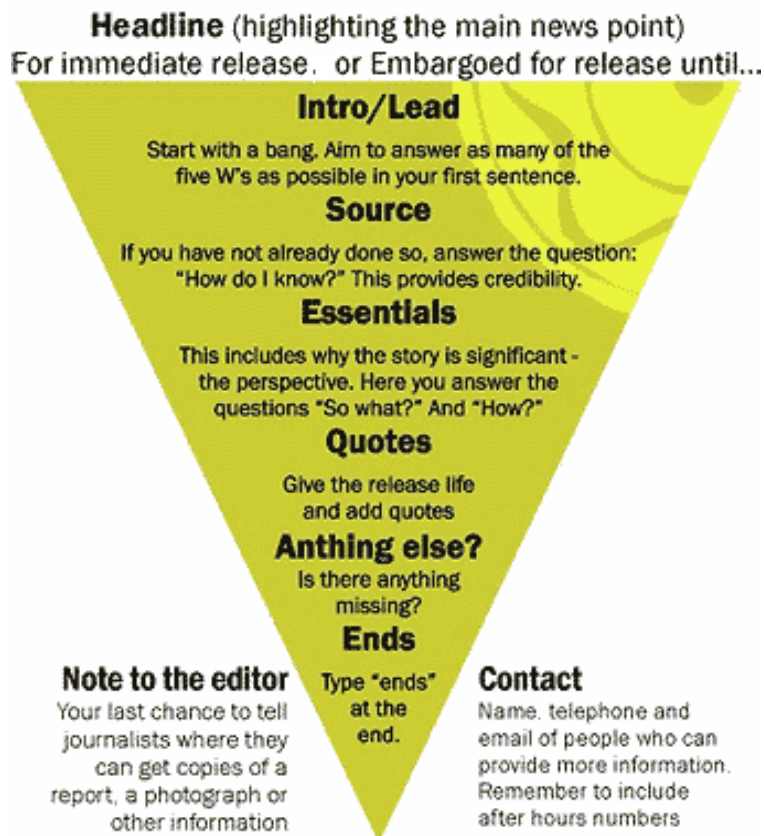
Web sites

Web sites are not limited in the way that hard-copy printed material is limited. Hence the natural discipline of the print medium is not felt, with the result that there is enormous length used sometimes on the Internet, which is never likely to be read. Hence attention to word-count is very important when writing and editing for the Internet or e-mail.

Illustration

An illustration that would express the nature of subtraction might be one of stone-carving, where the waste or surplus is chiselled away so as to reduce and shape the initial block down to what is wanted. Addition could be illustrated by an image of bricklaying, or of "[3D Printing](#)". But suitable images were hard to find, so we have used the illustration of [Additive](#) and [Subtractive](#) colour.

Press Release Format



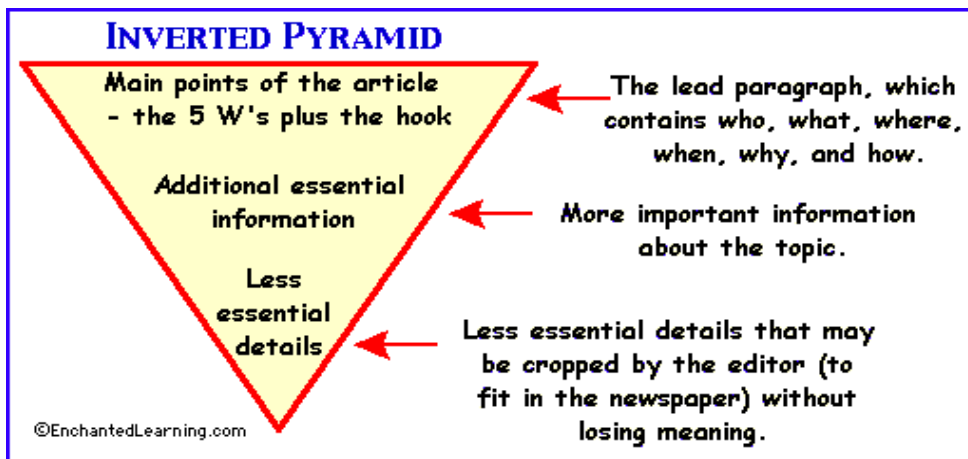
Press releases

A press release (media release) is a pre-written story, given by an interested party to a journalist for the journalist to publish. These press releases, nowadays, go out by e-mail.

If you define it like that, then everything else about a press release will follow logically. Everything is done in a way that is designed to save the journalist work, and time.

The press release must be short. It should not be longer than the space that the newspaper or radio programme will have available. This is because anything that is longer will have to be cut, and cutting down a text is work, that takes time. The journalists don't have any spare time.

The press release must be written in a style that is usable, or easily adjustable for use, in a newspaper or a radio bulletin. This means short sentences.



The press release should be on one topic only. For another topic, send another press release. If it is not possible to do this (e.g. after an executive meeting covering many topics), the press release should be clearly divided, with sub-headings.

The press release must be immediately verifiable. This means that the journalist must be able to confirm, usually by telephone, that you are the source of the press release. If the journalist cannot do this, then the story will be dropped at once.

At the bottom of your press release you should put “Issued by:” and follow that with the organisation that is issuing the statement.

Immediately after that, you should put “Contact:” and follow it with your name and cell phone number. You can also put your land-line number and e-mail address, and all details including your physical whereabouts; but the cell number is the crucial one.

Logo and Date

If you have a logo, use it at the top and centre. Under it, you can put the name of the organisation in text, even if it is clear in the logo. The reason is that your recipient’s system may strip off the logo and leave only text. Put the date there at the top, as well.

A Good “Subject” line

Your message needs a good “Subject” line. This is not exactly like a newspaper headline, but it must tell the journalist plainly what the statement is about. It goes in the “Subject” field of the e-mail, and it goes above the text of the message. Shorter is better.

Some people like to make a quotation that the journalist can use, like, say: President Zuma said: “The National Development Plan will help us to work together.” The words in quotation marks are supposed to be the original words of the person, which the journalist can then use in the article. This point is made in the graphic below. By the way, there is no shortage of advice on press releases on the Internet.

Sample Press Release

Month Day, Year

Headlines are Meant to Summarize the Topic of the Release
Subheads can go into more detail, but make sure they don't take away from the impact of your headline

CITY, State – The who, what, when, and where and why should all be included in one or two, to-the-point sentences. For example: Led by Joe Schmoe (City, State) and Jane Doe (City, State), the Boulder Barnstormers mounted a second half comeback against the Sarasota Fliers to win 15-14 and take home the Our City Classic title held at the Pleasantview Fields in “City”, “State” Saturday.

“A good way to get a point across without sounding like it’s an opinion is to have someone from the event or game that you are writing about give a quote that summarizes the point you are trying to get across,” said the Barnstormers Joe Schmoe. “After you mention the comeback, let Joe Schmoe tell it in his words to back you up. You add to the release by having a reliable source reiterate what you already wrote.”

The rest of the release should complement the beginning paragraphs. Put additional information, peripheral details and any tantalizing facts that make your release seem newsworthy.

Be sure to add local ties to the release that will make it more interesting. Even if you have a great team from another state in town for the tournament, your local media will still be more interested in the local players and teams participating.

Put your wrap-up paragraph at the end. If you didn’t already mention the next day’s match-ups or times, this is when you should do it. If it is a pre-event release this is a good place to recap what happened last year.

For more information please contact “your name or whoever will be in charge of media”, at email@wherever.com - 555-555-5555 ph. – 555-555-5555 fax
For more information online please visit www.tournament_or_organizationsite.com
For more information on the sport of Ultimate, please visit www.upa.org

What is also possible to do, but is hardly ever done, is to record a quotation, or a portion of a speech, and attach it to your press release as a sound file. This will help with radio, especially.

But as a rule, don’t use attachments when sending out press releases. Paste your text in the body of the message.

Press Releases as a news medium

Where there is a reception for it, your press release can go, and it is better for you that your full original message is read by those you wish to reach, as opposed to the edited one with contradictory statements added, that the newspaper may actually print.

For this reason, in South Africa, it has become normal to send press releases out as widely as possible. Press releases have the potential to by-pass the newspaper and broadcast media to a significant extent, and so to become a medium themselves.

Distribution list

E-mail distribution lists can be Google or Yahoo Groups, or they can be your own home-made list-serve, but you need them to be sending e-mail to addresses that are in use and not defunct.

E-mail that goes direct is what you want, and not a system that sends a message just to say there is a message. You want your message to appear in the in-box of your recipient, in such a way that the recipient can read the “Subject” line, and maybe the first few words of the message. You want it to be that if the journalist clicks on the message, he or she will immediately get the message, open, in full.

Distribution lists require a lot of maintenance. You need to be adding subscribers all the time. This is labour-intensive work. Therefore think twice before opening too many such lists.

On the other hand, get yourself on to as many as possible of other people’s lists so as to read their media releases, contrast and compare them with each other and with yours, and learn from how they do it.

Embargo?

Most people don’t bother with the “embargo” and “for immediate release” tags. Most of the time, they are superfluous. It is better to save “embargo” for the very occasional and rare times that it is really needed.

Course: Agitprop

25013, Writing, Editing and Press Releases, 2013

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